

Connection to Country

Project Engagement Strategy

Wee Waa High School Redevelopment

October 2021

1. Introduction

The NSW Government is investing \$7 billion over the next four years, continuing its program to deliver more than 200 new and upgraded schools to support communities across NSW.

School Infrastructure NSW (SINSW) aims to deliver school infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing population, and support modern, flexible teaching and learning. SINSW are delivering more than 200 new and upgraded schools while maintaining a portfolio of 2,200+ schools around the state and ensuring they're safe and fit-for-purpose spaces.

This engagement report has been prepared to outline the proposed engagement approach and seek agreement on the next steps. The delivery of this engagement will provide inputs for the Wee Waa High School project. This will assist the project team in addressing the Secretary's Environmental Assessments Requirements and responding to the State Design Review Panel process.

2. Background

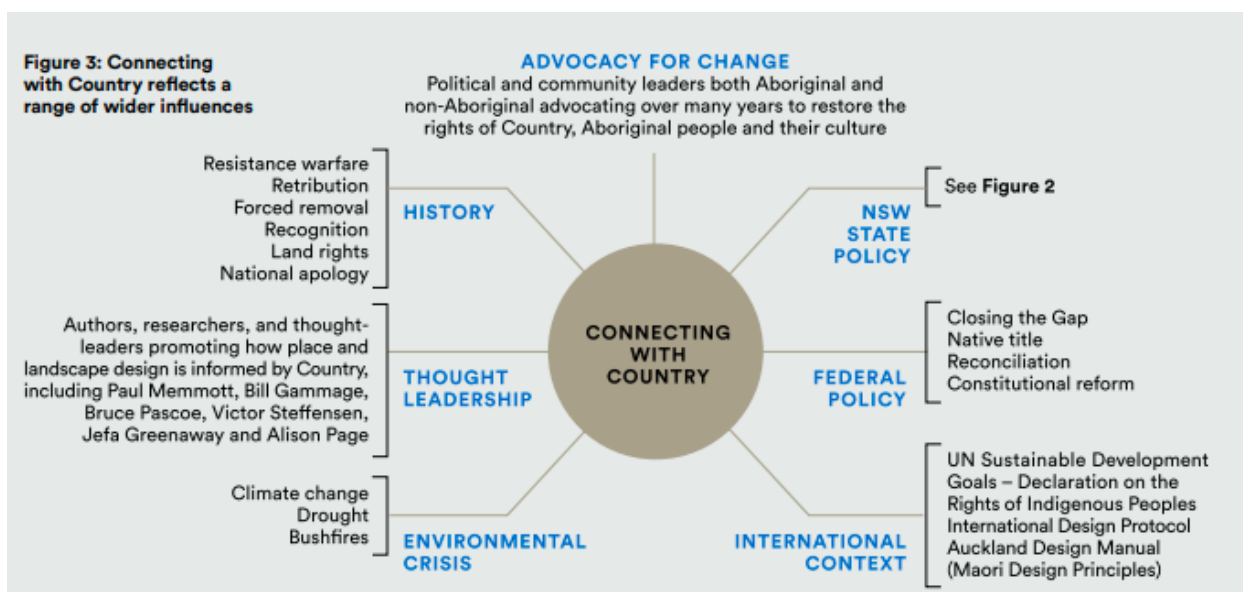
2.1. Connecting to Country Draft Framework

The Connecting with Country Draft Framework is a framework for developing connections with Country that can inform the planning, design, and delivery of built environment projects in NSW.

The objective of Connecting with Country is that everyone who is involved in delivering government projects will adopt the following commitment:

Through our projects, we commit to helping support the health and wellbeing of Country by valuing, respecting, and being guided by Aboriginal people, who know that if we care for Country – it will care for us.

The framework is informed by, and supports, a wider range of policies and objectives as show in the image below.



Source: *Connecting to Country, NSW Government Architect (2020).*

SINSW is committed to delivering on the framework through our school development projects. This reflects our Aboriginal Education Policy which includes a commitment to ensure that:

The strength, diversity, ownership and richness of Aboriginal cultures and Custodianship of Country are respected, valued and promoted.

This process is in addition to statutory requirements to assess development sites for evidence of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.

2.2. Narrabri Shire Council

The project site is located within the Narrabri Shire LGA. The Narrabri Shire Local Strategic Planning Statement 2040 is Council's statutory strategic plan for the LGA. The plan identifies a key priority to 'Protect Aboriginal culture and heritage'. Other priorities of relevance to the project from Council are that they will:

- *Adopt appropriate measures in planning strategies and local plans to protect Aboriginal heritage and recognise the contribution of cultural heritage values to the character and landscape of the region.*
- *Ensure Aboriginal people are engaged during the planning process*
- *Collaborate with Aboriginal communities to respect and protect Aboriginal culture and heritage*
- *Consider relevant Heritage NSW and Government Architect NSW's publications as part of carrying out the actions associated with this Planning Priority.*

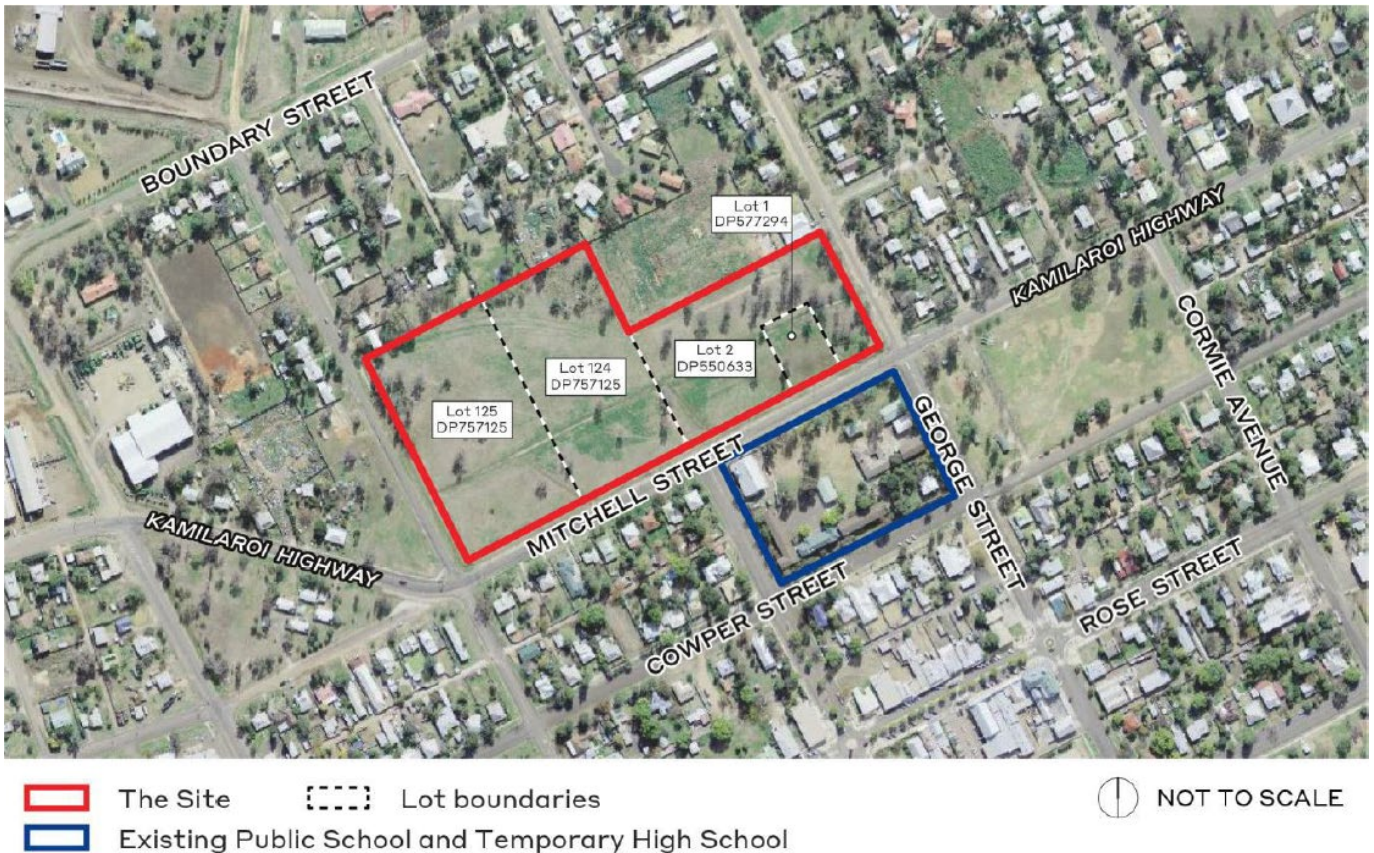
2.3. Project Description

The Aboriginal meaning of Wee Waa is "Fire for Roasting" from the language of the Kamilaroi people. With the Kamilaroi peoples' enduring connection with the land and their deep understanding of the natural environment, they are known as one of Australia's largest Aboriginal First Nations.

The redeveloped Wee Waa High School will support high-quality educational outcomes to meet the needs of students within the local community and deliver innovative learning and teaching spaces as follows:

- Construction of the following:
 - A new two-storey school building arranged in a U-shape courtyard typology, including teaching spaces, library/administration, staff facilities, and a multi-purpose gymnasium/hall.
 - A Covered Outdoor Learning Area (COLA).
 - One grass sport field with a perimeter running track and asphalt playing courts.
 - A standalone single-storey Agricultural and Environment Centre building.
 - A standalone single-storey Aboriginal Education Community and Learning Centre.
 - Internal vehicular access from George Street running east-west through the site.
 - Two at-grade car parking areas with a total of 40 parking spaces.

- Augmentations to the road network as required to ensure road safety, including a dedicated drop off/pickup area and bus bay along George Street.
- Removal of trees as required and retention where possible.
- Installation of landscaping, additional tree planting and fencing to integrate with the design of the new school.
- Installation of signage and public art.
- Installation and augmentation of associated services infrastructure to service the new school



Due to the value of the project, it is categorised as State Significant Development and will be assessed and determined by the NSW Department of Planning, Infrastructure and Environment. A key requirement of all SSD projects is that they demonstrate meaningful attempts to interpret the Aboriginal cultural heritage significance of the place into the development.

Plans and concept images for the proposed upgrades are provided as attached.

3. Proposed Continuing Engagement Approach

3.1. Objectives of Engagement

- To deliver on our commitment to Connect with Country.
- To engage meaningfully with local elders and our Aboriginal community leaders.
- To explore opportunities to reflect Country in our School Infrastructure projects.
- To contribute to the process of healing through a commitment to reconciliation.

3.2. Key Stakeholders

The key stakeholders are considered to include the following:

- Registered Aboriginal Parties (from ACHAR) – Gomeroi People (Representative)
- Aboriginal Education Consulting Group – President
- Wee Waa Local Aboriginal Land Council – CEO
- School Operations – Director of Educational Leadership, Wee Waa High School Principal, Wee Waa High School Deputy Principal, Wee Waa Public School Principal, High School Aboriginal Education Officer
- SINSW Project Team - SINSW (Delivery, Communications and Planning), TSA Project Management, SHAC Architecture, MBB Group

3.3. Proposed Method

The proposed engagement process is provided below.

- ***Initial Workshop/Working group***

This activity will be to describe the process, agree on the approach to the engagement and how future engagement will occur.

- ***Connecting to Country Workshop***

This workshop will be co-designed with key stakeholders with a view to describing the stories and themes that are of significance to the place.

- ***Follow-up Workshop***

The project team will use this material from the workshop and outline the opportunities for reflecting these stories and themes in the project. The items will be costed and prioritised and presented back to the group for endorsement.

The preferred item/items would then be incorporated into the final design of the upgrades or identified as projects that the School will deliver in the short, medium and long term with the stakeholder group.

Engagement Administration

- Regular meetings will be held as required in between key engagement sessions to refine ideas and clarify options.
- Community and Elder endorsement will be sought of workshop findings and recommendations

3.4. Emerging themes and suggested initiatives

Consultation and collaboration is ongoing with the School's Aboriginal Education Officer, the AECG, and the Wee Waa Local Aboriginal Land Council. The following emerging themes and suggested initiatives have been discussed.

Emerging themes and suggested Initiatives	Description
Indigenous Cultural Centre	A new stand-alone Indigenous Cultural Centre the Binaalbaa Room, meaning "A Learning Place", will be set in a native eucalypt woodland adjacent to the Library.
Yarning Circle	The new Indigenous Cultural Centre will include a "community circle" / yarning circle for sharing stories.
Traditional Land Management & Agriculture	Sustainably cultivating the river valley has endured as a cultural practice of the Kamilaroi for millennia. The region is today defined by modern agriculture production. Together the schools harvest in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Dhunbarrbila' (lots of edible grain/seed in one place - native grasses) & Bush Tucker • Aquaculture • Commercial farming practices (Cotton, Beef, Lamb, Forestry/Agro-Forestry)
Signage & Language	'Belong' is to be a key word engrained into the culture of the school, facilitating close knit social clan engagement and visibility.
External Meeting / Waiting Areas	Welcoming space with seating appropriate for all visitors to the Campus.
Totems and Murals	Totems play an integral role in Indigenous identity within the Kamilaroi nation. Opportunities exist to utilise an existing \$20k Totem grant at the new school to incorporate totems and murals within or upon the buildings and surrounding landscape.
Welcome Sign	The wayfinding and welcome signs are to be in native language including "we are on Gamilaraay lands".
Symbols, Stories & Themes	Water, Gathering, Harvest
Landscaping	Opportunities for cultural narrative through space for interpretive artwork, planting, materiality and functional spaces. The local Native Grasses are used as part of a pre-colonial indigenous agriculture study. Native grass fields onsite can assist further research and development of application. Future visions to create a "Food Park" will unite local people from all walks of life with an interest in investigating and using native plant food species
Artists & Artwork	Options to be developed for community artists' contributions.
Flag Poles	Three flag poles. Allowance for a group to gather.
Event Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoking Ceremony / Sod Turning • Community Information Day • Flag Raising • Naidoc Week • Reconciliation Day